Advocates for the Landscape: Alwin Seifert and Nazi Environmentalism

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ABSTRACT
Reexamining debates on ostensibly green facets of Nazism, this article offers a case study of the "landscape advocates" led by Alwin Seifert from 1934 to 1945. In contrast to previous accounts focused on the role of the landscape advocates in the construction of the Autobahn, the article assesses their work on a wide range of projects in Nazi Germany and across occupied Europe. It argues that existing scholarship has not fully recognized the extent of the landscape advocates' involvement in Nazi structures and has sometimes misunderstood the relationship between their environmental activities and blood and soil ideology.

Seven decades after the defeat of Hitler's dictatorship, the European landscape still bears the scars of war and genocide. With its technologically driven scorched earth strategy and the industrialized mass murder that accompanied it, the devastation wrought by the Nazi military machine belies any image of environmental harmony. Ecological concern is not among the elements popularly associated with the Third Reich. Yet historical debate about purportedly "green" aspects of Nazism has not faded. Timothy Snyder's controversial book Black Earth: The Holocaust as History and Warning brought renewed attention to the question of "Hitler's ecological
project," reviving a scholarly dispute that has been simmering for years.\(^1\) At the same time, this vexing theme seems more and more contemporary. Rising nationalist and populist movements currently claim ecological issues as their own, conjointly with anti-immigrant sentiment. Journalists in Germany and elsewhere have traced a growing trend of right-wing back-to-the-land movements harking back to the Nazi era and its rural ideology.\(^2\)

In light of this convoluted past and increasingly relevant present, the underlying historical question deserves careful consideration: Was there a discernibly environmentalist strand within the Nazi regime? If so, what impact did it have on Nazi policy? Perhaps no other figure embodies the contradictions of this unlikely history as clearly as Alwin Seifert, who has been characterized as "the most prominent environmentalist in the Third Reich."\(^3\) Seifert was well known during the Nazi era as a proponent of organic farming, championing "rootedness in the soil" and attacking the use of nonnative plant species.\(^4\) After 1945, he went on to become a key figure in the postwar environmental movement in Germany. As the charismatic leader of a coterie of like-minded followers, he gained considerable influence in Nazi circles.

From 1934 onward Seifert headed a group of environmental officials known as the *Landschaftsanwälte* or "advocates for the landscape," whose role was to oversee the ecological impact of public works projects sponsored by Hitler's regime. The importance of these landscape advocates remains contested. Some historians have downplayed their responsibilities, noting that they were "limited to a consultative function."\(^5\) Their work on the massive Autobahn construction project in the 1930s has understandably garnered most of the historical attention.\(^6\) This emphasis, however, has overshadowed other dimensions of the environmental history of Nazi Germany. Apart from the Autobahn, landscape advocates worked side by side with other Nazi agencies on a wide variety of ventures, from military installations to "settlement" initiatives in the occupied East to prestige projects for the top Nazi leadership. In order to extend previous accounts, it may be useful to reexamine the matter from the ground up based on a thorough evaluation of the primary sources.

At the center of this contentious history stands the mercurial figure of Seifert himself. Although the details are subject to debate, historians generally agree that Seifert "spoke the language of the emerging ecological movement."\(^7\) A thornier problem is whether he spoke the language of National Socialism with comparable conviction. The existing literature has sometimes been reluctant to acknowledge the extent of Seifert's commitment to Nazism. One standard account underscores his "tenuous position" within the Nazi hierarchy,\(^8\) while another doubts his dedication to "Nazi blood-and-soil ideology."\(^9\) The historical record yields a conflicting picture. Seifert (1890–1972) vigorously promoted an environmental worldview that shared fundamental points of contact with "blood and soil" principles, and the landscape advocates frequently invoked this Nazi slogan in their internal correspondence.\(^10\)

Active in the *völkisch* movement after World War I, Seifert joined the *Bund Naturschutz* in Bavaria in the 1920s, and by the end of the decade had established himself as a landscape architect in Munich. In 1933 he was introduced to Nazi party leader Rudolf Hess and was soon on cordial terms with Hess and his wife Ilse, who shared Seifert's interest in organic cultivation.\(^11\) Seifert's lasting friendship with the Hess family strongly shaped his career during the Third Reich. Just as decisive was his 1933 encounter with Fritz Todt, who had recently been appointed inspector general for German roadways. A rising star in the Nazi apparatus, Todt eventually came to oversee the far-flung *Organisation Todt*, which coordinated engineering and construction projects across Nazi-occupied Europe. His chief task at the beginning of Nazi rule was building the Autobahn network. Seifert's timely intervention with Todt in autumn 1933 laid the groundwork for the formation of the landscape advocates corps.

Hess and Todt served as Seifert's primary sponsors among senior Nazi officials, and Seifert made canny use of the opportunities this presented. The final key element in his background was his dedication to a particular variety of organic farming, the biodynamic method founded by Rudolf Steiner in 1924. Seifert embraced
biodynamics in 1930, becoming one of its chief spokesmen upon Hitler's rise to power. Biodynamic agriculture rejected artificial fertilizers and pesticides for environmental and health reasons. Its practitioners viewed the farmstead as a living organism and hoped to restore balance to the natural world. Thanks in part to Seifert's indefatigable advocacy, biodynamic agriculture became the most successful variant of organic farming in Nazi Germany.

Seifert's early backing for biodynamics turned out to be prescient. Despite opposition from the chemical industry, the Reich League for Biodynamic Agriculture attracted a remarkable array of high-profile Nazi supporters from 1933 onward. Several of Seifert's closest associates were drawn from the ranks of biodynamic proponents. When the core group of landscape advocates was officially formed in early 1934 with Seifert as coordinator under Todt's patronage, five of the initial eight members were active in the biodynamic movement. The group grew quickly as Seifert solicited further applicants among landscape architects and gardening professionals. Within two years, the number of landscape advocates had increased to thirty. Seifert praised them as "collaborators in the great achievement of the Führer." The centerpiece of that "great achievement," and the chief factor responsible for the rapid growth of the landscape advocates corps, was the construction of the Autobahn.

Building the new highways was a signature Nazi project, portrayed in propaganda as indispensable to Germany's economic revival. The entire undertaking has been aptly described as "an onslaught on the natural environment." Yet the task assigned to the landscape advocates was no less consequential, despite its limited remit. They were to oversee the environmental impact of ongoing construction and ensure that roadways were harmoniously embedded within the landscape. It is tempting to see these efforts as a mere fig leaf designed to cover up the ecological consequences of an inevitably destructive enterprise, but such judgments misconstrue the historical issues at stake. The experience of the landscape advocates is better understood as part of a shift from earlier preservationist concerns toward active engagement with shaping the German landscape in ecologically sensitive and sustainable ways. Above all, their work represented a fusion of environmental aspirations with Nazi ideals.

Seifert produced a steady stream of letters and circulars to the landscape advocates exemplifying this combination of ecological and Nazi principles. He lectured his subordinates on the proper "National Socialist worldview," while describing the aim of their work as the "restoration of the primordial German landscape in all its diversity." His colleague Camillo Schneider, a longtime supporter of biodynamics who had known Seifert since the 1920s, asserted confidently in 1935 that all "true friends of nature" recognized the work of the landscape advocates as a "milestone for the Third Reich." By reversing the previous century of "rationalism" and destruction of the natural world, Nazism was finally responding to the "ecological needs" of "our German landscape." Rejecting the notion of merely beautifying highway routes with decorative additions, Schneider proclaimed that the landscape advocates were committed to a long-term vision based on cooperation with nature.

Themes like these were not just meant to please the public but recurred throughout the internal correspondence among the landscape advocates. In many cases, the terrain they worked on had long since been severely degraded. Before construction even began, they found themselves faced with landscapes marked by "complete desolation"; their task was to restore ecological harmony and heal the wounds inflicted during the "materialist" era before the advent of Nazism. Undoing decades of monoculture and reckless neglect of "natural laws," the landscape advocates extolled the Teutonic values of "blood and soil, closeness to nature, and rootedness in the earth." Their work would create "Lebensraum for a healthy German nation." The guiding principle, in Seifert's words, was "care for all living creatures."
What did this mean in practice? The landscape advocates introduced a variety of measures on Autobahn construction sites which were then extended to subsequent projects. One of the first priorities was protecting the topsoil. Rather than disposing of the vegetation cover and layers of soil removed during the initial stages of building, these were retained in a series of labor-intensive steps. Topsoil was preserved for later agricultural use, while plant materials were combined using biodynamic procedures to form compost piles that lined the planned routes. Once construction was completed, the landscape advocates oversaw an equally laborious process of reseeding the new roadsides with regionally selected native plant species. In some cases, they argued for altering the course of the roadway or modifying its design due to environmental concerns. They paid particular attention to trees, wetlands, and wildlife habitat, working to ensure as little disturbance as possible.

Because these efforts required the cooperation of the engineers and technicians responsible for building the new roads, they were not always successful. There were notable accomplishments, however. In one 1936 instance, Seifert toured an Autobahn segment in southern Germany and was dismayed at the lack of proper environmental measures. He wrote indignantly to Todt: "It is unacceptable for highway construction in the Third Reich to continue taking part in this devastation of the landscape." Todt sent off a strongly worded order to local construction officials, cutting off funds until they complied with the requirements of the landscape advocates.

More ambitious projects highlighted the commitment to organic principles shared by Seifert and his associates. In September 1940 Todt announced that roadside rest areas throughout the Autobahn network would serve biodynamic fruits and vegetables. A group of landscape advocates, headed by Max Schwarz of the Reich League for Biodynamic Agriculture, were tasked with designing a model rest stop based entirely on biodynamic tenets. The location chosen for this project was the town of Boskovice, 220 kilometers east of Prague in the so-called Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia, the Czech lands annexed by Germany in 1939. Schwarz and his colleagues developed detailed plans for a self-sufficient biodynamic farmstead attached to the rest area, complete with orchards and livestock, to provide organic food for travelers. The remarkably thorough proposal foresaw completion of the farm before construction of the highway began so that workers building the Autobahn could be fed with biodynamic produce. Though eventually rendered moot by the shifting fortunes of war, the plans had the full support of Todt's office as late as September 1941.

Examples like these indicate the extent to which the landscape advocates' agenda influenced concrete policy decisions. Seifert's tendency toward self-promotion has nonetheless clouded an informed assessment of the matter. His extravagant claims of an exemplary harmony between nature and technology fit perfectly with Nazi propaganda but did not reflect reality. Historians have remained skeptical of such claims, wary of perpetuating the "myth of the green Autobahn." These concerns are justified. Seifert's proposals were frequently overruled, and the tensions between him and Todt escalated into open conflict in 1937. The image of the Nazi Autobahn as a pure ecological success story is obviously distorted. But a focus on disproving Seifert's exaggerations can inadvertently obscure the environmental efforts of his subordinates. Even if their tenacity did not always carry the day, the modest cadre of landscape advocates introduced a wide range of innovative practices and remained steadfast in their dual dedication to natural ideals and Nazi precepts. It was not just rhetoric when Todt declared them "the conscience of the German countryside."

Aside from their contested role in the monumental Autobahn venture, the landscape advocates' other activities revealed the contours of environmental engagement in Nazi Germany. One important example concerns the sometimes awkward relationship between Seifert's staff and traditional conservation organizations, which tended to view the landscape advocates as upstarts and rivals. They nonetheless assisted each other consistently in a practical partnership that went much further than the "occasional cooperation" recognized by previous scholars. In June 1937, landscape advocate Hinrich Meyer-Jungclaussen was asked to lead a major conference sponsored by the Reich Agency for Nature Protection, with the participation of prominent...
Conservation leader Hans Schwenkel praised the landscape advocates as a "magnificent example" of National Socialism's "respect for nature," commending their "recovery of forest habitat" and reliance on native German plants. Schwenkel supported the landscape advocates from the beginning and participated in their internal meetings. Their work on the Autobahn "earned the enthusiastic approval of Heimat and nature conservationists." Seifert touted Schwenkel's writings to Hess and Todt and helped disseminate them among Nazi agricultural officials. He also gave direct backing to a series of conservation campaigns. In 1939 Seifert endorsed the nature protection movement's efforts to save an endangered river, in 1940 he joined an ad hoc conservationist alliance trying to stop construction of a cement plant, and in 1941 he supported the attempt to preserve a favorite forest south of Stuttgart. Conservationists thanked Seifert profusely for his work on their behalf. In 1942 Max Schwarz noted the "superb teamwork" between landscape advocates and conservation officials.

Seifert published regularly in conservationist journals throughout the 1930s and took part in private meetings of nature protection professionals. Though marked by ambivalence on both sides, the cooperation between conservationists and landscape advocates continued well into the war years. Still, Seifert and his companions regarded their own approach as superior. Their aims went far beyond mere preservation. Invoking a holistic conception of nature, the landscape advocates held that the "hitherto primarily conservationist activities of the nature protection organizations" were simply "not adequate" to the demands of the modern era. Commitment to "blood and soil" required a "biological" understanding of the ecological challenge.

This assertive stance garnered the landscape advocates a laudatory reception in Nazi publications. Articles appeared in provincial newspapers, popular journals, and official party organs, many of them focused on Seifert himself. In October 1934 he was portrayed as the paragon of a "truly National Socialist" approach to the landscape, and in April 1942 as the leading representative of "respect for nature, life, and ancient wisdom." Seifert, in turn, published an array of articles in Nazi periodicals outlining his amalgam of environmentalism and National Socialism. Always keen to make use of publicity, he was especially pleased by Todt's decision in May 1940 to name him Reichslandschaftsanwalt or Reich Advocate for the Landscape. His newly earned designation, as grandiose as it was vague, reflected the ambition to supervise all substantive landscape questions facing the Third Reich.

Seifert's actual accomplishments fell short of that goal, but the landscape advocates did succeed in significantly expanding their involvement. Beginning in 1934, several of them eagerly took up posts with the Reich Labor Service, established under Nazi auspices to combat unemployment through compulsory work schemes. Their positions became official in 1935 and continued into the war years as environmental advisors on numerous local and regional projects. Working at the planning level and directly with labor camps in rural areas, the landscape advocates soon realized they faced entrenched resistance to "biological insights," but the cooperation proved productive. In 1936 the Reich Labor Service planned to appoint a landscape advocate to each Gauleitung or regional Nazi party organization throughout Germany. They emphasized that previous generations had disrupted the "balance" of the natural world and failed to take a "holistic view" of the environment. But this destructive approach, which was "alien to nature," had been overcome at last thanks to "the leadership of the Third Reich." Now, Germany recognized that "nature cannot be corrected."

Much of the landscape advocates' work for the Reich Labor Service centered on rivers and waterways, providing an occasion to introduce sustainable measures and restore "organic" criteria that were "closer to nature." Protecting lakes and preserving clean water was an important priority for Seifert. The objective was to reduce the use of cement and other artificial materials to an "unavoidable minimum" in order to safeguard
"natural elements of the landscape." Small branches of larger rivers and islands with wild growth were to be left intact.\textsuperscript{52} Seifert also contributed to renewable energy projects across Germany. He argued successfully for building hydropower plants in ways that detracted least from surrounding natural areas, aligning himself firmly with conservationist pleas.\textsuperscript{53} Such efforts continued throughout the war years; landscape advocates were still developing wind power projects in 1944.\textsuperscript{54}

Even as they continued working for the \textit{Organisation Todt}, the landscape advocates' responsibilities consistently widened. When work on the Autobahn came to a standstill due to military priorities, they brought an environmental sensibility to myriad other projects, rural as well as urban. Wilhelm Hübotter designed the \textit{Sachsenhain}, an open-air Nazi memorial erected in the north German countryside as a monument to the ancient Germanic past.\textsuperscript{55} Camillo Schneider was appointed landscape advisor for Berlin, and Max Schwarz received the same position in Hamburg. They produced elaborate proposals for greening Germany's cities.\textsuperscript{56} When plans began for a new "Hermann-Göring-Stadt" to house factory workers, Seifert was asked to supervise green space. Several of his colleagues worked on the Kaiser-Wilhelm-Kanal during the first year of the war.\textsuperscript{57} By 1944 the landscape advocates boasted of their work for "nearly all state ministries" at the "highest levels of the Reich."\textsuperscript{58}

From highly visible public projects to top-secret military installations, the landscape advocates lent their talents to the full spectrum of developments in Nazi Germany. Seifert worked on a series of prominent residential estates designed as model communities for high-ranking Nazi officials, including plans for the "Führersiedlung Linz" in annexed Austria. One of the more extensive settlements was located in the picturesque village of Pullach south of Munich. Known as the "Reichssiedlung Rudolf Hess," the Pullach estate began in 1936 as a pet project of party leader Martin Bormann. Seifert served as the landscape architect and oversaw work on the sizeable gardens, which were run on biodynamic lines. It was an opportunity to try out his ideas on ecological water usage and the proper treatment of topsoil. Residents received regular instructions from Seifert's staff about compost and natural fertilizers. Hitler visited the community frequently.\textsuperscript{59}

These projects were not isolated exceptions. Landscape advocate Wilhelm Hirsch was in charge of the vegetable gardens at various "Führer Headquarters" used by Hitler and Nazi commanders at locations across Europe.\textsuperscript{60} Hitler's own household in Obersalzberg began using biodynamic produce in 1937, arranged by Seifert with the help of Ilse Hess. The landscape advocates found an experienced biodynamic gardener to work at the Obersalzberg estate.\textsuperscript{61} Even the grass at the huge \textit{Reichssportfeld} in Berlin, site of the 1936 Olympics, was grown and tended according to biodynamic methods.\textsuperscript{62} Hirsch was chosen to plant fruit trees and organize a composting system for a newly created rural community in Hesse, dubbed in Nazi propaganda "the most beautiful village in Germany."\textsuperscript{63} The landscape advocates' connections also led to contracts with Nazi dignitaries. Max Schwarz was hired by Robert Ley, head of the German Labor Front, to convert Ley's private estate in the Rhineland to biodynamic methods.\textsuperscript{64}

Though the advent of war in 1939 brought ecological ruin to much of the continent, the landscape advocates saw it as a vital chance to increase their influence. Many of them were initially called up for service, but Todt arranged to have Seifert released from military duty. As early as January 1940 Max Schwarz, Carl Siegloch, and Wilhelm Hirsch were already engaged in camouflage operations at the \textit{Westwall}, known in English as the Siegfried Line, a series of fortifications along the western German border. By April they were giving lectures to army officers on "camouflaging in harmony with the landscape."\textsuperscript{65} This project occupied the landscape advocates for years and gave them a prime opportunity to implement their environmental ideas in a military setting. The aim was not simply to provide effective concealment techniques and protect the fatherland, but to "return the landscape to its natural character."\textsuperscript{66}
Work on the *Westwall* was so successful that the German armed forces invited Seifert's men to take over camouflaging responsibilities at sites from the Atlantic coast to Ukraine. By 1944, eight groups of camouflage specialists were active, each with its own landscape advocate, working to disguise military facilities and munitions factories with natural materials in order to blend in to the surroundings. But involvement in the Nazi war of conquest went considerably further. One of the central elements of German occupation policy in Eastern Europe was the "resettlement" program through which Slavic populations were removed from their lands and replaced with ethnic German "settlers." The landscape advocates played a part in this process of ethnic cleansing. In 1941, Schwarz assisted Nazi resettlement officials near the Polish town of Śrem, annexed to the Reich in 1939, helping German farmers arrange the fields and gardens expropriated from the former residents. He declared the experience "highly valuable." Seifert maintained regular contact with high-level Nazi functionaries who supervised the resettlement program. In some cases landscape advocates oversaw forced labor battalions in occupied eastern Europe, commanding thousands of Russian prisoners and foreign workers.

Long before the German invasion of the Soviet Union, the landscape advocates had a hand in shaping occupation policy in the East. Within a few months of the fall of Poland, Guido Erxleben received a commission for "green design" in the annexed Polish provinces. Seifert spelled out the principles for such tasks in a programmatic essay on "The Future of the Landscape in the German East." He sent a copy to Rudolf Hess, explaining how the "eastern emptiness" with its unfortunate "Slavic" character could be "transformed into a true homeland for Germans." The landscape advocates endeavored to put these principles into practice throughout occupied Europe. Werner Bauch developed meticulous plans for renewing the eastern countryside to restore its "biological diversity" and ensure a "healthy, bountiful, natural life." He argued that bio-dynamic cultivation offered ideal techniques to guide this work. In December 1941 Bauch called for turning a large stretch of the Carpathian mountains into a nature preserve for German "settlers." Other landscape advocates led reforestation efforts in Ukraine or submitted reports from the Crimea, Belarus, Moldavia, and elsewhere.

Bauch's itinerary epitomized the peripatetic career of a landscape advocate in the Third Reich. Seifert repeatedly praised him as one of the most capable environmental experts and Bauch's duties brought him to many different territories under Nazi control, from spa towns in the Sudetenland to woodlands in occupied France to the fjords of Norway. In 1941, Bauch was hired, as a "close colleague" of Seifert, to design an idealized agrarian settlement in rural Thuringia as a showcase of "the future German peasantry." He also carried out special landscape responsibilities for Heinrich Himmler and the SS. "My ongoing work in the East," Bauch reported to his fellow landscape advocates in May 1943, "keeps me constantly on the road." From 1942 onward, he was employed at Auschwitz, where he conducted composting experiments and directed a large gardening complex and tree nursery. Seifert supported these activities enthusiastically, offering advice to Bauch and arranging contacts with Nazi officials.

The energetic Reich Advocate for the Landscape himself was directly involved with the biodynamic plantation at Dachau. Built by camp inmates beginning in 1938, the 180-acre plantation continued to expand until 1944, growing medicinal herbs and other organic products for the SS. In addition to extensive fields, it included greenhouses, herbariums, laboratories, spice mills, and a research institute. Working conditions on the plantation were often dire for inmates assigned to its labor commando, leading to the death of countless prisoners. Seifert was a frequent visitor to the Dachau plantation and cooperated closely with its head gardener, SS officer Franz Lippert, who was responsible for maintaining biodynamic standards.

Lippert, a prominent figure in the Reich League for Biodynamic Agriculture, had known Seifert since the early 1930s. Before joining the concentration camp, he oversaw operations at Weleda, the renowned biodynamic company, from 1924 to 1940. Lip-pert supplied biodynamic materials to Seifert and kept him informed of events at the Dachau plantation. It was no minor undertaking. With the establishment of the plantation and its surrounding apparatus, "Himmler had succeeded in realizing a project particularly close to his heart." Its fields
served as a testing ground for visions of organic simplicity on the backs of inmate labor. When the plantation was enlarged in 1941, rather than use horses for plowing, "the SS command preferred to see it tilled by hand with spades." According to Seifert's rivals, he viewed the Dachau estate as "his own domain," continually bragging about biodynamic achievements there.

The official purpose of the plantation was to meet Germany's need for "natural medicines," part of a larger network of SS enterprises growing organic products for military and civilian use. It also grew tea and spices, as well as vegetables for the camp garrison. In correspondence with Himmler, SS leaders acclaimed the performance of "our head gardener Lippert," while the landscape advocates referred to him as an authority on biodynamic techniques. Seifert invited other Nazi officials to accompany him to the plantation to see Lippert's work firsthand. With their help, Ilse Hess arranged to have prisoners from Dachau assigned to work in her house and garden. Seifert's collaboration on the Dachau project continued until shortly before the liberation of the camp in April 1945.

For all their commitment to Nazism's vision of a Greater German Reich, the landscape advocates faced formidable obstacles from other sectors of Hitler's polycratic regime. Seifert made as many enemies as friends within the Nazi bureaucracy, and his position seemed imperiled without the protection of his powerful patrons. The first blow came in May 1941 when Hess flew to Britain, triggering a crackdown on his previous associates. Though Seifert himself remained unmolested, the Reich League for Biodynamic Agriculture was forcibly dissolved in June 1941. Todt died in a plane crash in February 1942, leaving the landscape advocates institutionally stranded. They found a workable arrangement with Todt's successor Albert Speer, but largely depended on personal contacts with Nazi bosses. Seifert's own relations with representatives of the regime were typically strained; though he joined the party in 1937, his imperious manner alienated many who did not share his enthusiasm for environmental themes. He engaged in a bitter personal feud with the Gauleiter of Munich, and rivalries with other Nazi agencies involved in landscape planning consumed much of his attention.

Despite these hurdles, Seifert managed to weather the loss of both Hess and Todt. He kept his title of Reich Advocate for the Landscape and continued his hectic pace of activity on behalf of Speer's ministry, crisscrossing the continent on various assignments. In 1943 alone, Seifert visited virtually every corner of occupied Europe, from the western coast of France to the Vistula river, from Denmark to Greece, from the Polish hinterlands to the Italian Alps. He was still a sought-after speaker, giving invited lectures on ecological topics to the Reich Labor Service, the Hitler Youth, and other Nazi organizations. After repeated requests to Speer's staff to grant him proper rank and a corresponding uniform, Seifert was promoted to the civilian equivalent of general in 1944. The landscape advocates maintained their loyalty to him, expressing confidence in their work and its crucial importance to Germany's future.

Even the worsening military situation did not deter them. In the eyes of the landscape advocates, the privations of war encouraged a renewed emphasis on self-sufficiency and sustainability, allowing Germans "to find their way back to the soil and its living forces." With the Allies closing in, Seifert remained stoic. In a March 1945 letter to Todt's former deputy, he offered a retrospective testament to his work as Reich Advocate for the Landscape. He repeated his enduring critique of the destructive aspects of technology and mechanistic worldviews, reiterated his mystical conception of the soil as source of life and healing, and affirmed his romantic image of Germany as the true homeland of respect for nature.

Beliefs of this sort were common enough in the völkisch milieu that shaped Seifert's thinking before the rise of Nazism. What gave them peculiar dynamism was Seifert's resolution to turn his ideals into practical policy and his ability to inspire the landscape advocates with a shared vision. He did not shy away from using the resources of the Nazi state to implement these ideas. In a 1937 letter to Hess, Seifert outlined his chief environmental concerns, from the protection of German soil to the wellbeing of wildflowers. Nature conservation laws, he
warned, could only do so much. The more urgent goal was to focus on "education of the youth and, ultimately, of the whole nation." Seifert argued that the Third Reich must make greater use of "the unlimited capabilities at the party's disposal in order to impress new truths on every member of our nation in the most forceful way possible." Then, "after a suitable transition period, anyone who will not listen will be punished."95

It can be difficult, in hindsight, to reconcile such draconian views with an environmentalist orientation. The landscape advocates' emphasis on peaceful cooperation with the natural world appears incompatible with the vast martial apparatus of the Nazi dictatorship. How could people who espoused "a new appreciation for the environment" and "ecological balance" and "the harmony of nature"96 have anything to do with Hitler's war of conquest, racial resettlement, and concentration camps? The seemingly uncanny convergence between blood and soil ideology and modern ecological concepts makes more historical sense when seen in the context of early environmental thought. In the first decades of the twentieth century, in Germany as elsewhere, racial beliefs and environmental sentiments often went hand in hand.97 A stance that "combined landscape aesthetics, ecological concern, and racial pride" was not an anomaly, but "shared by most conservationists."98

Seifert was no exception. The opening paragraph of his 1935 disquisition on "The Endangerment of the Living Foundations of the Third Reich" declared that the very existence of "Aryan mankind" depended on the defeat of "Western and Bolshevik materialism" and a return to the values of "reverence, homeland, nature." As late as March 1945 he was still writing about "racial hygiene" from a "holistic biological viewpoint."99 Whether in peace or wartime, Seifert presented an ecological outlook as essential to his work on behalf of the Nazi regime. In a lengthy 1935 letter to the Times of London, Seifert described the mission of his landscape advocates. "We do not of course advocate a sentimental back-to-nature policy," he assured English readers. "Our endeavour is rather to read in the books of Nature and to encourage and help her, without coercion, to proceed along her own way—having found that she refuses to proceed along ours."100 An anonymous landscape advocate offered a similar rationale in an American journal in 1940, explaining that the central objective was to restore the German countryside "in the same way in which nature would do it."101

Even though their eventual impact was inconsistent at best, the breadth of the landscape advocates' involvement in Nazi practices demonstrates a determined environmentalist strand in the Third Reich. Because this finding can be misused as fodder for attempts to rehabilitate Nazism or discredit environmentalism, it is important to delineate the historical implications. This requires looking past the period of 1933 to 1945 and taking seriously the appeal of blood and soil politics, including the provocative potential of racial ideologies and their uncomfortable proximity to various forms of ecological thought. Historians have long recognized the "cult of the countryside" as "a mystification and an evasion of reality."102 Seifert and his associates conjoined this mystified image with the brutal institutions of Nazi Germany.

Viewed against that backdrop, Seifert's actions reveal much more than merely "superficial support" for Nazism.103 The landscape advocates offer an occasion to reconsider the troublesome question of green tendencies within the Nazi movement overall. Foreshortened assessments of the subject continue to appear in accounts of the Third Reich and in surveys of environmental history. In the words of a recent overview: "While a few high-ranking Nazis expressed some sympathy for organic farming and the preservation of what they saw as quintessentially German landscapes, such views were always subordinated to the regime's military and economic aims."104 This formulation misses the extent of active support for organic farming and landscape preservation, which went well beyond a few high-ranking Nazis and was hardly just a matter of sympathy. From the Westwall to Ukraine, the far-reaching contributions of the landscape advocates show that environmental goals were not merely subordinated to the regime's military and economic aims but integrated into them.

Beyond unsettling standard expectations, the history examined here casts longstanding controversies over Nazism and modernity in a new light. Recent research confirms that Nazi agrarianism and ruralism were
compatible with extensive modernization, an insight applicable to the landscape advocates as well.\textsuperscript{105} These findings lend substance to interpretations of the Third Reich as an instance of "organic modernity," an alternative form of modern society premised on organic principles.\textsuperscript{106} The principles were not always realized. Seifert and his cohort largely failed to fulfill their grand vision of ecological restoration, but its tenacious pursuit stands as a telling sign of environmental ambitions that did not come to pass. Unfinished initiatives by the landscape advocates were comparable to Nazi plans for immense reforestation in the conquered East, one of many projects the regime prepared but did not carry out.\textsuperscript{107}

The equivocal legacy of "Hitler's ecological project" poses a dilemma for historians of Nazi Germany and environmental historians alike. Far from a personal idiosyncrasy of the Nazi leader, it indicates a basic tendency within National Socialism itself, one that disrupts conventional assumptions about environmental politics. But historical interest in the topic seems to invite misunderstanding. Apologists for Nazism are all too eager to publicize ostensibly redeeming aspects of the regime, while anti-environmentalists gladly seize on any suggestion of a link between ecology and Hitler. A more complex conception of the blood and soil program can help forestall such responses by offering historically contextualized analysis of the disconcerting affinities between environmentalism and Nazism, two currents often considered ideologically unrelated and politically opposed. The case of Seifert and the landscape advocates points toward a substantive confluence between ecological longings and Nazi policies, with implications that extend beyond Germany and beyond the era of the Third Reich. As chants of "blood and soil" arise at far-right rallies in twenty-first-century North America, scholarly engagement with this challenging history provides a chance to illuminate the past while speaking directly to contemporary concerns.

Notes

8. Zeller, "Molding the Landscape," 159. Though much of my argument will be directed against Zeller’s influential interpretation, his work is indispensable to historical understanding of the landscape advocates.


10. The voluminous correspondence among the landscape advocates from 1934 to 1944 is spread across several archival collections; the most important of these include Bundesarchiv Berlin (BA) N2520 and R4601; Archiv des Deutschen Museums (ADM), Munich, NL 133; and especially the Alwin Seifert Nachlaß Weihenstephan (ASNW) at the Lehrstuhl für Landschaftsarchitektur und öffentlichen Raum, Technische Universität München. I am grateful to Prof. Regine Keller for facilitating access to the Weihenstephan holdings.

11. Part of Seifert's correspondence with Rudolf Hess is held at the Institut für Zeitgeschichte (IfZ), Munich, ED 32; for Seifert’s correspondence with Ilse Hess see Staatsarchiv München (StAM) Spruchkammerakten K 1511 Alwin Seifert, subfile "NSDAP/Seifert."

12. Details on Seifert's adoption of the biodynamic approach can be found in his 1929–1932 correspondence with Camillo Schneider, ASNW F3a 188.


15. Todt to Seifert, February 17, 1934, ADM NL 133/56. The biodynamic proponents were Max Schwarz, Carl Siegroch, Hinrich Meyer-Jungclaussen, Guido Erxleben, and Werner Bauch. A sixth member, Wilhelm Hirsch, was sympathetic to biodynamics. Several further biodynamic practitioners, including Camillo Schneider, Hermann Mattern, and Wilhelm Hübotter, joined the landscape advocates in the following months.


26. Seifert to Todt, April 12, 1936, and Todt's April 16, 1936 order, ADM NL 133/57.
28. Max Schwarz to Alwin Seifert, March 18, 1941, Betr: Rastplatz Boskowitz, ASNW F1b 151; "Aktenvermerk" by Hans Lorenz, September 8, 1941, BA N2520/36: 62. These elaborate plans, consistently endorsed by Todt's staff, serve as a counterexample to the argument that "landscape-friendly" aspects of the Autobahn became "increasingly obsolete" after the start of the war (Zeller, Driving Germany, 136).
29. Todt and Seifert reconciled in late 1937. At his de-Nazification proceedings and in his memoirs, Seifert portrayed the conflict in overly dramatic terms, claiming that he quit working for Todt for nine months in 1937. Though this claim has been repeated in the historical literature, it is not borne out by the correspondence between Todt and Seifert, which continued uninterrupted throughout 1937; see ADM NL 133/57.
31. Zeller, Driving Germany, 111; for a detailed account of the mutual tensions see 109–117.

37. Seifert to Todt, May 12, 1937, ADM NL 133/57; Seifert to Hess, July 9, 1937, IFZ ED 32/1: 92; Seifert to Hans Riecke, May 20, 1939, StAM K 1511 "Riecke."

38. Seifert to Todt, February 16, 1939, StAM K 1511 "Amt für Technik"; Seifert to Todt, January 21, 1940, ADM NL 133/58; Seifert to Robert Wetzel, March 10, 1941, ASNW F1c 175; Karl Kronberger to Seifert, August 2, 1939, ADM NL 133/61.

39. Schwarz to Seifert, August 10, 1942, ASNW F1b 152.


44. Peter Breuer, "Der Gartenarchitekt Alwin Seifert" *Völkischer Beobachter*, October 7, 1934; Melly Paarmann, "Der Reichslandschaftsanwalt und seine Aufgaben" *Münchener Neueste Nachrichten*, April 19, 1942.

45. Alwin Seifert, "Gartengestaltung" *Völkischer Beobachter*, June 9, 1934; Seifert, "Von der Muttererde" *Der Schulungsbrief: Das zentrale Monatsblatt der NSDAP*, November 1938, 373–377; Seifert, "Hat der Wald Einfluss auf das Klima?" *Nationalsozialistischer Gaudienst* (Innsbruck), July 24, 1944. On Seifert's articles in the *SS-Leithefte* see his 1944 correspondence with the editors, ADM NL 133/30.

46. The official appointment, dated May 31, 1940, thanks the landscape advocates as a group for their service to Germany: ADM NL 133/58.

47. Max Schwarz to Hinrich Meyer-Jungclausen, July 12, 1934; Schwarz to Seifert, August 31, 1934 (ASNW F1b 150); Meyer-Jungclausen to Todt, May 31, 1935, BA R4601/860/1: 124.


57. Seifert to Todt, February 11, 1940, ADM NL 133/58; Max Schwarz, "Überblick über die Landschaftsgestaltung am Kaiser-Wilhelm-Kanal" October 28, 1940, ASNW F1b 151.

58. Wilhelm Hirsch to Reichsminister für Rüstung, July 25, 1944, StAM K 1511 "Landschaftsanwälte."  

59. Archiv des Architekturmuseums der TU München (ATUM), Seif-162, subfile "Pullach"; Susanne Meinl, Geheimobjekt Pullach: Von der NS-Mustersiedlung zur Zentrale des BND (Berlin: Links, 2014), 32–41. For details on Seifert’s supervision of "Grünstreitung" at the Führersiedlung Linz see Seifert to Baurat Gutschow, April 13, 1943, StAM K 1511 "Vorträge"; ATUM Seif-162 "Führersiedlung Linz."

60. Hirsch to Seifert, July 20, 1940 and July 22, 1942, ASNW F1b 131.

61. Seifert to Carl Siegloch, April 5, 1937 and October 18, 1937, ASNW F1b 153; Seifert to Franz Lippert, October 13, 1937, BA R9349/3/S; Seifert to Camillo Schneider, November 13, 1937, ASNW F1b 146.


64. Max Schwarz to Seifert, August 21, 1940, ASNW F1b 151.

65. Hirsch to Seifert, February 13, 1940, ASNW F1b 131; Schwarz to Seifert, April 22, 1940, ASNW F1b 151.


68. December 1941 report from Max Schwarz in the landscape advocates' internal Rundbrief, ASNW F1a 119.

69. See Seifert’s 1937–1944 correspondence with Hans Riecke and 1941–1944 correspondence with Oswald Pohl, StAM K 1511 "Riecke" and "Reichsführer-SS."

70. Hirsch to Seifert, June 22, 1942, ASNW F1b 131, described his work in Ukraine supervising "zirka 2-3000 fremdländischen Arbeitskräften" installing acres of vegetable beds to feed German troops; in the June 1942 Rundbrief Hirsch wrote: "Es standen mir für meine letzten Arbeiten im Osten ca. 3000 Menschen zur Verfügung, zumeist russische Gefangene" (BA N2520/36).

71. Max Schwarz to Seifert, January 11, 1940, ASNW F1b 151.
75. Gerhard Schwarz, "Reisebericht aus der Ukraine" July 1943, ASNW F1a 119; reports on "Die Holzpflanzungen der Ukraine" and "Die Pflanzenwelt der Krim" from June 1942 *Rundbrief*; Ludwig Roemer, "Das Land zwischen Dniester und Bug" March 1942, BA N2520/36: 115–120.
76. Rudi Peuckert to Werner Bauch, November 14, 1941, Thüringisches Hauptstaatsarchiv Weimar (THSA), Landesbauernschaft Thüringen 1: 23.
77. May 1943 *Rundbrief*, ASNW F1a 118; Bauch particularly emphasized his work on "kriegswichtige Aufgaben des Reichsführers SS." In the December 1941 *Rundbrief*, he reported taking on "landschaftsgestalterische Sonderaufgaben des Reichsführers SS."
78. Seifert's correspondence with Himmler in support of the landscape advocates can be found in ASNW B2/37 and StAM K 1511 "Reichsführer-SS." For the detailed 1942–1944 correspondence on Auschwitz between Bauch and Seifert see ADM NL 133/061.
81. Lippert to Seifert, July 31, 1942; Seifert to Lippert, February 15, 1943, ASNW A3; Lippert to Pohl, December 2, 1943, BA NS19/208: 6; Pohl to Seifert, May 30, 1944, StAM K 1511 "Reichsführer-SS."
84. Hermann Giesler, *Ein anderer Hitler: Bericht seines Architekten* (Stegen: Druffel & Vowinckel, 2005), 314. For details on biodynamic experiments at the plantation see DA A3724 and A150.
85. 1941 report from Dachau by the Deutsche Versuchsanstalt für Ernährung und Verpflegung, DA A52.
86. December 1940 *Rundbrief*, BA N2520/36: 9; Pohl to Himmler, September 15, 1942, BA NS19/208: 2.
87. Seifert to Gauamt für das Landvolk, Innsbruck, June 28, 1944, ASNW A3; Ilse Hess to Seifert, February 26, 1945, StAM K 1511 "NSDAP/Seifert." Seifert's correspondence with Lippert at Dachau continued to March 1945; see ADM NL 133/24.
88. For details on Gestapo actions against the biodynamic movement see Camillo Schneider to Seifert, June 30, 1941, ASNW F1b 146; Seifert to R. Walther Darré, June 12, 1941, BAK N1094/II/1; Rudi Peuckert to Hermann Reischle, June 26, 1941, THSA Landesbauernschaft Thüringen 2: 74.
90. On his feud with the local *Gauler* see Seifert to Reichsministerium Speer, September 21, 1943, StAM K 1511 "Amt für Technik." Regarding his longstanding rivalry with Heinrich Wiepking, Himmler's expert for landscape questions in occupied eastern Europe, see Seifert to Himmler, November 29, 1944, ASNW B1/20.
91. November 1943 invitation from the *Reichsarbeitsdienst* to give a talk on "Heimatkunde und Naturschutz"; May 1944 invitation from the Gauwaltung Schleswig-Holstein to give a talk on "Mensch und Landschaft im deutschen Raum—Der Sieg des Natürlichen"; StAM K 1511 "Vorträge" and "Reichsführer-SS." Seifert
kept extremely thorough travel records for purposes of reimbursement; see the abundant 1943 documentation in ADM NL 133/59.

92. The official order from April 4, 1944 is in StAM K 1511 "NSDAP/Seifert." His new rank was the third highest position within the entire organization; its armband insignia included the swastika. See the "Dienstrangordnung der Organisation Todt" in ASNW F1d 178.

93. Max Schwarz, "Künftiger Landschaftsaufbau" May 19, 1944, ASNW F1a 119. See also the final internal Rundbrief of the landscape advocates, from December 1944, in the same file.

94. Seifert to Eduard Schönleben, March 2, 1945, ADM NL 133/63.


96. All quotes from Max Schwarz, "Das Wesen des Baumes" Demeter June 1936, 95–100.


107. See Peter Steinsiek, *Forst- und Holzforschung im "Dritten Reich"* (Remagen: Kessel, 2008), 297–302, detailing Nazi reforestation plans in occupied Eastern Europe; large stretches of cultivated land were to be reforested through forced labor by Slavic populations who were then to be expelled. Though little of this was actually accomplished, it reveals crucial features of Nazism's approach to subjugated peoples, to the landscape, and to the natural world.